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The doctrine of resurrection in the Book of Mormon

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The Doctrine of Resurrection in the Book of Mormon

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THE DOCTRINE OF RESURRECTION IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

A. Keith Thompson

Abstract: The doctrine of resurrection was taught by Lehi and Jacob among the first Nephites but was not mentioned again in the record until the time of Abinadi, perhaps 350 years later. In the court of King Noah that doctrine and the idea of a suffering Messiah who would bear the sins of his people and redeem them, were heresies and Abinadi paid for them with his life. While Abinadi's testimony converted Alma₁ and the doctrine of the resurrection inspired Alma₂ after his conversion, it was a source of schism in the church at Zarahemla along lines that remind us of the Sadducees at Jerusalem. The doctrine of the resurrection taught in the Book of Mormon is a precursor to the doctrine now understood by the Latter-day Saints in the light of modern revelation. One example is that the Nephite prophets used the term first resurrection differently than we do. But perhaps the most remarkable thing about the way that the doctrine of resurrection develops in the Book of Mormon, is that it develops consistently. That consistency bears further testimony to the prophetic mission of Joseph Smith. He could not have done that by himself.

The Book of Mormon narrative does not focus upon heretical teachings. However, anecdotal references to the teachings of anti-Christ and others among the Zoramites, Nehors, and Amalekites demonstrate to modern readers that the doctrines that the Book of Mormon editors considered heretical had a distinctly Jewish or rabbinical flavor. Sherem's insistence that Jacob had perverted the Law of Moses into "the worship of a being which ye shall say shall come many hundred years hence" (Jacob 7:7) is a case in point. Nephi, Jacob, and King Benjamin all taught that the Messiah prefigured in the Law of Moses would be a suffering Messiah, that he would be named Jesus Christ, and that He would take upon Himself the sins of the world. Nephi said that he had purposely avoided teaching his people "concerning the manner of the Jews" because their works were "works of darkness" (2 Nephi 25:2, 6), but still a rabbinical view of the Messiah surfaced among the Nephites and was

perpetuated by the Zoramites among others. Perhaps this should not surprise us since both these Old and New World peoples aspired to live their lives in accordance with the Law of Moses. But where did those ideas come from if the Nephite prophet leaders tried to suppress them? Did they develop in parallel because “the author of all sin” (Helaman 6:30) simply used the same successful strategy among both Old and New World peoples, or did these heretical ideas come to the New World with Zoram¹ or the Mulekites? Is there more to this correlation than the Book of Mormon editors have admitted or than current Book of Mormon scholarship has considered?

One example concerns the resurrection from the dead. This is a fundamental teaching among the Book of Mormon peoples where the heretical treatment may have a connection with the Old World doctrinal development. All Christians are familiar with the theological difference between the Pharisees and the Sadducees concerning the resurrection of the dead. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all recount the question that the Sadducees brought to the Savior concerning Levirate marriage. All three of those gospel authors report that the Sadducees “say there is no resurrection” (Matthew 20:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27). Jesus’ answer confirmed that there is a resurrection at the same time as he confirmed that the Sadducees’ question about marriage proceeded from some mistaken assumptions. When did the Sadducees’ denial of the resurrection (Luke 20:27) originate? How sincere were the religious beliefs of the Sadducees if they denied the resurrection? And are there any traces of this Sadduceean heresy in the Book of Mormon? This last question is poignant since Abinadi was martyred for his religious teachings concerning the Messiah and the resurrection (Mosiah 18:2), which were interpreted as a form of sedition in King Noah’s court (Mosiah 17:8).

Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery are said to have completed their translation of the Book of Mormon in sixty-five days.² That calculates to a little more than eight printed pages a day. This article reiterates the view that their work was authentic. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery could not have maintained the consistency of all the threads in the narrative and the doctrine developed if they did it themselves in sixty-five days. By

1 Thompson, A. Keith, “Who was Sherem?” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 14 (2015): 1–15.

2 “How long did it take Joseph Smith to translate the Book of Mormon”, *Ensign*, January 1988, 47.

now someone would have demonstrated inconsistency not only on the balance of probabilities, but beyond reasonable doubt.

The doctrine of resurrection as taught to Alma₁ by Abinadi and then developed by Alma₁'s personal descendants in their prophetic ministries here traced is a very good example of that internal consistency.

In Part I, I will discuss the debate about the doctrine of the resurrection in rabbinical teaching before Christ. In Part II, I will discuss what other Latter-day Saint scholars have observed about the doctrine of resurrection in the Book of Mormon. In Part III, I observe that although Lehi and Jacob taught the doctrine of resurrection, it was not mentioned in the Large Plates of Nephi until Abinadi taught the people of King Noah that the redemption to be worked out by the Messiah included the resurrection of the physical body from the grave. In this part, I will explain that King Benjamin may not have known that the atonement to be worked out by the Messiah included the free gift of bodily resurrection from the grave. While this suggestion may run contrary to reader expectation, if we are to correctly understand how much of the gospel that we take for granted was understood in earlier dispensations, we must be careful not to impute to those earlier dispensations, knowledge that they did not have. While Latter-day Saint readers in the twenty-first century may think of the words, redemption, atonement and resurrection as synonyms, it should not be assumed that the ancients understood them in the same way that we do. In Part IV, I will explain the aspects of the doctrine of resurrection that Abinadi clarified beyond what was included in the Small Plates of Nephi and how that knowledge is less than we have in the last dispensation by virtue of latter-day revelation in Sections 76 and 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants. In Part V, I discuss other contributions made to the development of the doctrine of resurrection in the Book of Mormon after Abinadi, noting that it is unlikely that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery would have been able to maintain the consistency of that development in the short sixty-five day translation period. I conclude that a deepened understanding of the nature of the possible loss, restoration, and development of the doctrine of resurrection in the Book of Mormon shows that we have only begun to scratch the surface of the depths of this sacred record.

Part I — Origins of the Sadducean Denial of the Resurrection

Arthur Marmorstein wrote that “teaching and belief [in the resurrection] existed among the Israelites when they settled on Jewish soil.”³ He cited Isaiah (Isaiah 26:14, 19) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 37:12–14) as his authorities⁴ but interpreted these passages to mean that the “wicked ... will never leave their homes in the dust.” Daniel (Daniel 12:2) confirmed his belief in the same doctrine and Marmorstein thus said that “in the last two or three centuries before Jesus it was a part of the Jewish belief,”⁵ though “we cannot state that there was no opposition.”⁶ He quoted Abot de R. Nathan and Baneth for his belief “that the Sadducees were the successors of an older school opposing the doctrine of a future life as a part of the reform of the old religion of Israel.”⁷ Their doctrine was not only that there was no “revival after death, but also [that there was no] ... blessed future life.”⁸

Other scholars have tried to pinpoint the origin of the Sadducean doctrine more exactly, and an uneasy consensus holds that it likely originated with a schism in the school of one Antigonus, a Rabbi around 264 BC, which is well after Lehi, Zoram, and the Mulekites left Jerusalem.

One of Antigonus’ disciples named Sadoc (or Zadok) was said to have derived the falsity of the resurrection doctrine from Antigonus’ instruction that “they should not serve God through hope of reward but through love and filial reverence only.”⁹ Sadoc is said to have elaborated,

3 Arthur Marmorstein, “The Doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead in Rabbinic Theology,” in *Studies in Jewish Theology*, J. Rabinowitz and M.S. Lew eds., Oxford University Press, London, 1950, 577.

4 Note, however, that both Isaiah and Ezekiel postdate the arrival of the Israelites on Jewish soil.

5 Marmorstein, *The Doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead*, 578.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 See <http://lavistachurchofchrist.org/LVanswers/2007/10-21a.html>, quoting Adam Clarke’s commentary on Matthew 16:1. See also <http://www.livius.org/saa-san/sadducees/sadducees.html> where the learned commentators add that Antigonus’ school broke in two — the Sadducees who followed Zadok and the Boethusians who followed Boethus like Marmorstein quoting Avot de Rabbi Nathan. The Rabbi Nathan also said that both groups withdrew from the study of the oral Torah because it was unreasonable of their ancestors to have believed that the reward for a day’s labors should be delayed beyond the evening. However, though they state that “the historical value of this anecdote is questionable,” the date of the schism (two generations after Antigonus, circa 140 BCE) does neatly

“There were neither rewards nor punishments after this life, and, by consequence, that there was no resurrection of the dead, nor angel, nor spirit in the invisible world; and that man is to be rewarded here for the good or evil he does.”¹⁰ These inferences were justified by the refusal of Sadoc’s disciples to receive any scripture other than the five books of Moses, which do not explicitly refer to the resurrection at all.

Marmorstein quoted later rabbis who answered the absence of resurrection teaching in the written Torah with the statement that “there is no commandment in the Torah of which the reward for fulfilling it being mentioned, where the doctrine of resurrection is not implicit.” References to a blessed future following the judgment of God are among abundant proofs for the doctrine in Genesis, Numbers, Deuteronomy, the Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, and Hosea.¹¹

A natural question arises for all modern Jews and Christians when they ponder the Sadducees’ denial of the resurrection: if the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, then what did they believe? In a Jewish theology that denied the resurrection, what justification remained for a life of faith and good works? Were the Sadducees anything more than nominal religionists who professed religion for political benefit?

Though all scholars acknowledge that we only know of the Sadducees and their doctrine from hostile sources,¹² and though some infer that the Sadducees merely professed belief to protect their aristocratic political power,¹³ most accept that their acceptance of the written Torah or first five books of Moses was genuine. “The Sadducees maintained that the only way for truly pious behavior was to live according to the written Law. . . . [They] stressed the importance of the priests in the Temple cult” and in their jurisprudential *Book of Decrees*, they insisted on a literal eye for an eye where the Pharisees would allow the payment of damages in

correlate with the likely origin of the Sadducee movement. See also <http://bible.org/seriespage/sadducees>, where Allen Ross also discusses the origin of the Sadducees but suggests the Boethusians became the Herodians and the followers of Zadok in this schism, the Sadducees.

10 See <http://lavistachurchofchrist.org/LVanswers/2007/10-21a.html>, quoting Adam Clark’s commentary on Matthew 16:1.

11 Marmorstein, *The Doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead*, 581.

12 See <http://lavistachurchofchrist.org/LVanswers/2007/10-21a.html>. See also Deacon Duncan, “Life after Death, as the Sadducees saw it,” 8 November 2009, <http://blog.evangelicalrealism.com/2009/11/08/life-after-death-as-the-sadducees-saw-it/>.

13 John Piippo, “Why Did the Sadducees Deny the Idea of the Resurrection?,” 18 November 2010, <http://www.johnpiippo.com/2010/11/why-did-sadducees-deny-idea-of.html>.

lieu of a lost organ.¹⁴ In Acts 23:6–9, the Sadducees are said to have denied not only the resurrection but also the existence of angels, but reasonable commentators believe Luke (or Paul) was exaggerating since the written law is replete with accounts of angelic ministers, though perhaps not of the winged variety.¹⁵ Other commentators observe that the Sadducees did believe in an afterlife, though not in a resurrection of the body since they believed in the benighted dominion of Sheol.¹⁶

Josephus has stated that the Sadducees did not believe in fate, but instead they attributed human achievement to the choice and works of men.¹⁷ But Josephus is more explicit in his *Jewish War* where he stated that “the Sadducees . . . take away fate entirely entirely, and suppose that God is not concerned in our doing or not doing what is evil; and they say, that to act what is good, or what is evil, is at men’s own choice, and that the one or the other belongs so to every one, that they may act as they please.”¹⁸

Whatever the origin and exact nature of Sadduceean theology, there is some correlation between their reported rigor in observance of the written law and Sherem’s insistence in Jacob 7:7 that “the right way of God” was to keep the law of Moses. Similarly, the Sadduceean insistence that men prosper in this life according to their works corresponds to Korihor’s insistence in Alma 30:17 that “every man fared in this life according to the management of the creature.” This *correlation* allows the suggestion that there may have been older origins for Sadduceean theology than has yet been traced by modern scholars.¹⁹ What of the Sadduceean insistence that there is no literal bodily resurrection? Would that idea have been familiar to some of the peoples of whom we read in

14 See <http://www.livius.org/people/sadducees/>.

15 Ibid.

16 Deacon Duncan, “Life after Death, as the Sadducees saw it,” quoting John C. Meyers’s book, *Christian Beliefs and Teachings*. C.S. Lewis is also here said to have stated that the Sadducees believed in Sheol.

17 Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 13:172–173. See also <http://bible.org/seriespage/sadducees>.

18 Josephus, *Jewish War* 2:162–166.

19 Note the writer’s essay suggesting earlier origins for the Jewish synagogue than have been generally contemplated by the scholars of Judaism. In part those earlier origins are justified by the existence of synagogues among Book of Mormon peoples who could not have brought this institution with them if had not originated until the Babylonian captivity (*Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 3 (2013) 155–195).

the Book of Mormon — and does that infer older origins for an anti-resurrection theology in Judaism than the second or third century BC?

Part II — Resurrection in the Book of Mormon

Robert J. Matthews notes that information about the resurrection “is rather uneven in the Book of Mormon.”²⁰ He notes no mention of the resurrection when Nephi₁ received an extended version of his father’s vision of the tree of life,²¹ no mention of the resurrection in quotations from the prophets Zenock, Neum, and Zenos even though they gave detailed prophecies concerning the Messiah’s crucifixion and burial,²² and no express reference to resurrection in King Benjamin’s valedictory sermon, “though it is certainly implied.”²³ “Lehi speaks mostly in broad general terms,”²⁴ “Jacob is more explicit . . . than any of his predecessors,”²⁵ but Abinadi is a major if not the “major contributor to our knowledge of the resurrection”²⁶ in the Book of Mormon. For though Alma₂ and Amulek clearly added to and expounded on the teachings of resurrection that came to Alma₂ through his father from Abinadi, it was Abinadi who restored this doctrine in Nephite teaching after an absence of between 300 and 400 years.

Matthews points out that despite the later teachings of Samuel the Lamanite and Moroni, and the appearance and ministry of the resurrected Christ, which demonstrated and explained the physical resurrection, the Book of Mormon “does not define or distinguish between the quality of resurrected bodies.”²⁷ Nor does the Book of Mormon teach about the degrees of glory in the resurrection. That knowledge came to us through one of Paul’s letters to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 15) and in the latter-days through the revelations that comprise Sections 76 and 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants. The Book of Mormon prophets, to the extent that they discuss the matter at all, distinguish between only “the most wicked and the most righteous”²⁸ when they discuss resurrection.

20 Robert J. Matthews, “The Doctrine of Resurrection as Taught in the Book of Mormon”, *BYU Studies* 30:3, 41, 42.

21 *Ibid.*, 42.

22 *Ibid.*

23 *Ibid.*, 45–46.

24 *Ibid.*, 43.

25 *Ibid.*, 45.

26 *Ibid.*, 46.

27 *Ibid.*, 52.

28 *Ibid.*

In their statistical study of the use of the word “resurrection” in the Book of Mormon, which “can help us focus our attention on what we can learn from the emphasis that a speaker places (or does not place) on resurrection,”²⁹ Hilton and Johnson confirm that:

- King Benjamin (among others) did not use the word at all.³⁰
- Although Alma₂ used the word more than any other in the Book of Mormon text, Abinadi used it more frequently.³¹
- The reason for Abinadi’s more frequent use of the word “may lie in [his] testimony that ‘redemption cometh through Christ the Lord’ (Mosiah 16:15).”³²

None of these authors appear to have considered the possibility that the lack of use of the word resurrection between Jacob and Abinadi may have been the result of what Jarom, Omni, and their successors Amaron, Chemish, and Abinadom described as stiffneckedness (Jarom 1:3, 4), wickedness (Omni 1:2), and the gradual departure of a culture of receiving revelation among the Nephites.³³ During this period of perhaps 350–400 years, those who wrote the Small Plates of Nephi suggest that the spirit of the Lord declined among the Nephites in various ways. Jarom said that he had nothing to add to what his fathers said (Jarom 1:2), though not all were “stiffnecked” (Jarom 1:3). Omni, his son, said that he had lived a wicked life (Omni 1:2) and had only dealt with the plates to pass them on to his son in accordance with his father’s command. Jarom’s grandson Amaron recounted that 320 years after Lehi came to the promised land, “the more wicked part of the Nephites had been destroyed ... because the Lord” would not preserve them when they did not keep his commandments (Omni 1:5–7). And though the apostasy word favored by Latter-day Saints in describing the gradual loss of priesthood authority and truth among the early Christians is not used, the words of those record keepers suggest that the work of the Holy Spirit among the Nephites had fallen away since there was nothing of “preaching of prophesying” among them that was worthy of record

29 John Hilton III and Jana Johnson, “Who Uses the Word *Resurrection* in the Book of Mormon and How Is It Used?,” *BYU Studies* 21:2, 30, 32 (2012).

30 Ibid, 32.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid, 33.

33 Jarom says that in his day, there were many among the Nephites who received revelations (Jarom 1:4). But three generations later, Abinadom “know[s] of no revelation save that which has been written” (Omni 1:11).

until the time of King Mosiah₁ (Omni 1: 10–13). In fact Abinadom says quite bluntly that he “know[s] of no revelation save that which has been written, neither prophecy” (Omni 1:11).

Part III — Abinadi’s Teaching About Resurrection

Because Abinadi’s teaching about resurrection is central to understanding the doctrine of resurrection in the Book of Mormon, it is set out in full so that the detail may be appreciated:

Yea, and have they [all the prophets (Mosiah 13:33)] not said also that he [the Messiah/God (Mosiah 13:33, 34)] should bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, and that he, himself, should be oppressed and afflicted? (Mosiah 13:35)

For were it not for the redemption which he hath made for his people, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, I say unto you, were it not for this, all mankind must have perished. But behold, the bands of death shall be broken, and the Son reigneth, and hath power over the dead; therefore, he bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead. And there cometh a resurrection, even a first resurrection; yea, even a resurrection of those that have been, and who are, and who shall be, even until the resurrection of Christ – for so he shall be called. And now, the resurrection of all the prophets, and all those that have believed in their words, or all those that have kept the commandments of God, shall come forth in the first resurrection; therefore, they are the first resurrection. They are raised to dwell with God who redeemed them; thus they have eternal life through Christ, who has broken the bands of death. And these are those who have part in the first resurrection; and these are they that have died before Christ came, in their ignorance, not having salvation declared unto them. And thus the Lord bringeth about the restoration of these; and they have a part in the first resurrection, or have eternal life, being redeemed by the Lord. And little children also have eternal life. But behold, and fear, and tremble before God, for ye ought to tremble; for the Lord redeemeth none such that rebel against him and die in their sins; yea, even all those that have perished in their sins ever since the world began, that have wilfully rebelled against God, that have known the commandments of God, and would not keep

them; these are they that have no part in the first resurrection. (Mosiah 15:19–26)

And if Christ had not risen from the dead, or have broken the bands of death that the grave should have no victory, and that death should have no sting, there could have been no resurrection. But there is a resurrection, therefore the grave hath no victory, and the sting of death is swallowed up in Christ. He is the light and the life of the world; yea, a light that is endless, that can never be darkened; yea, and also a life which is endless, that there can be no more death. Even this mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruption shall put on incorruption, and shall be brought to stand before the bar of God, to be judged of him according to their works whether they be good or whether they be evil — If they be good to the resurrection of endless life and happiness; and if they be evil, to the resurrection of endless damnation, being delivered up to the devil, who hath subjected them, which is damnation. (Mosiah 16:7–11)

While it was Abinadi’s denunciation of the wickedness of King Noah and his people that saw him bound, cast into prison, and then tried by King Noah and his priests (Mosiah 11:20–29), it was his teaching that “God himself should come down among the children of men” (Mosiah 17:8) that King Noah’s court fixed upon as a crime worthy of the death penalty. While in a modern court we might have expected that Abinadi would have been charged with sedition or treason in suggesting that the established government was the cause of their Lamanite war, the court settled upon the death penalty because of a religious offence.³⁴

It is well known that Alma₁ was the only officer of King Noah’s court who believed the words of Abinadi. That appears from his own record and from what the voice of the Lord said to him later when he inquired concerning how he should deal with transgressors in the Church.³⁵ His summary of what he learned from Abinadi and subsequently taught

34 This is one among many other aspects of Abinadi’s ministry and teaching that typified Christ. See also Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997, 171-172).

35 Mosiah 17:2; 26:15. We are justified in believing that Alma₁ was the source of the material on the large plates of Nephi from which Mormon abridged the account that has come down to us in the Book of Mormon since he presents as the only person who would have known the fact of his singular belief.

believing subjects of King Noah outside the court is set out in Mosiah 18:2. He taught “the words of Abinadi”

concerning that which was to come, and also concerning the resurrection of the dead, and the redemption of the people, which was to be brought to pass through the power, and sufferings, and death of Christ, and his resurrection and ascension into heaven.

Alma₁ made a distinction between Abinadi’s teaching about the resurrection and his teaching concerning the redemption, which we now also call the atonement. That same distinction appears in Mormon’s summary of what Abinadi taught in King Noah’s court. There Mormon summarized that Abinadi had said that Moses prophesied of “the coming of the Messiah” and “that God should redeem his people” (Mosiah 13:33). Abinadi had gone on to say that “all the prophets” had said “that God himself should come among the children of men, and take upon him the form of man, and go forth in mighty power upon the face of the earth” (Mosiah 13:33–34). Abinadi had continued that “all the prophets” (Mosiah 13:33) had also said that the Messiah “should bring to pass the resurrection of the dead” (Mosiah 13:35).

Abinadi’s teaching of how the Messiah “should be oppressed and afflicted” (Mosiah 13:35) was then set forth in Mosiah chapters 14 and 15 along with explicit detail as to how the Messiah would redeem the faithful through his atonement and redemption. This redemption, which saves “all mankind” from perishing spiritually, required that “the bands of death ... be broken” (Mosiah 15:20). For Abinadi, the “first resurrection” was “of all the prophets, and all those that have believed in their words, or ... kept the commandments of God” (Mosiah 15:22) who have lived on the earth “until the resurrection of Christ” (Mosiah 15:21). While this meaning of the *first resurrection* phrase is different than the way most Latter-day Saints now use that phrase, when we think of the audience of Abinadi and Alma₂, we understand why they and others who spoke of resurrection before the coming of Christ would not have considered our modern use of that phrase, which encompasses those who have lived righteously down to the final judgment as forming part of that same generic *first resurrection*.

Fasting and prayer about this detailed teaching concerning the *first resurrection* later led Alma₂ to further revelation about resurrection.³⁶ But it had also been the cause of some contention in the Church at

36 See below in Part V.

Zarahemla before Alma₂ succeeded to the office of high priest. Indeed, Alma₂ seems to have been part of the source of that contention for he and the sons of Mosiah₂ were part of the “rising generation” (Mosiah 26:1) who “did not believe what had been said concerning the resurrection of the dead, neither did they believe concerning the coming of Christ” (Mosiah 26:2).

Mormon’s abridgement, here from the Large Plates of Nephi, does not say that they did not believe in the law of Moses. Rather it says that the rising generation rejected what had been taught by King Benjamin in his sermon at the temple and what had been taught, probably by Alma₁ following Abinadi, concerning the resurrection of the dead and the coming of Christ. And Mormon summarized that “they would not be baptized; neither would they join the church” (Mosiah 26:4).

Mormon’s abridgement does not make clear whether King Benjamin or Abinadi was the source of these teachings (the resurrection of the dead and the coming of Christ³⁷), but it is clear that the rising generation rejected what had been taught by both of these modern prophets. That problem was in part solved by the conversion of Alma₂ and the sons of Mosiah₂ as influential members of that rising generation recorded in the following chapter. But the core problem of apostasy from the doctrine taught in the church of God, established by Alma₁ following the teaching of Abinadi, led to unprecedented discussion between the first officers of the divided Nephite church and state (Mosiah 26:6–12). Before that time,³⁸ the King of the combined people of Mosiah₁ and Zarahemla had been a theocratic ruler and Benjamin as the second king of that combined people had been their leader in military, political, theological and liturgical matters. But from soon after the time Alma₁ brought his people to live as fellow citizens with the people of Zarahemla, Mosiah₂ had either delegated or abdicated his former religious functions in favor of Alma₁.

The rising generation were not alone in their dissent. Their dissent seems to have struck a chord among the Nephites at Zarahemla. They were not atheists, but rather, those who “would not be baptized . . . [nor] join the church” (Mosiah 26:4), “were a separate people as to their faith, and remained so ever after” (Mosiah 26:4). While the keeper of the Large Plates of Nephi considered that these people were “carnal and sinful”

37 Note that Abinadi also knew that the Messiah to come would be called Christ though there is no statement of how he knew that (Mosiah 15:21).

38 Perhaps from the time that Amaleki delivered the Small Plates of Nephi to King Benjamin as discussed below.

(Mosiah 26:4) and were not given to prayer (Mosiah 26:4), he does not say that they were not people of faith. Their faith was simply different and for a time, Alma₂ and the sons of Mosiah₂ were numbered among them.

It is not surprising that Mormon has not given us a record of the script Alma₂ and the sons of Mosiah₂ used in their efforts to “deceive” those “who were in the church” (Mosiah 26:6) and who believed in the coming of Christ and in the resurrection. But it is not reasonable to surmise that their approach was completely areligious. It is more likely that they followed a version of the pre-existing faith of the people of Zarahemla, before either King Benjamin or Abinadi had taught them concerning the ministry of Christ and the resurrection.

When Alma₁ received his revelation of how to deal with those who did not follow the teachings of the church (Mosiah 26:14–32), the Lord reiterated the truthfulness of what he had been teaching and the validity of his establishment of a church in consequence (Mosiah 26:15–17). The Lord confirmed to Alma₁ that baptism was required of all who should join the church (Mosiah 26:21, 22) and that He would take upon Himself the sins of the world (Mosiah 26:23) and redeem and bring them forth to live “eternally at [His] right hand” (Mosiah 26:24). When Alma₂ and the sons of Mosiah₂ were met on the road by the angel of the Lord, they were essentially taught that the church established by Alma₁ was the Lord’s church and by implication that its teaching that they had opposed, were true and correct. They thus knew that Christ would come down among men, that He would redeem the faithful and resurrect them in a glorious first resurrection at the time that He, the Christ, would be resurrected.

Alma₂ and the sons of Mosiah₂ then tried to reclaim all the members of the church who had been lost because of their teaching of a different faith, but they were not entirely successful (Mosiah 27:32, 35–36). It thus appears that after Alma₁ was given authority by King Mosiah₂ to establish the Church of Christ among the people of Zarahemla, that there were at least two sorts of religion among them. The church led by Alma₁, a church or faith followed by those who followed the law of Moses but who did not believe in the coming of Christ and the resurrection from the dead, and perhaps some others who subscribed to an older perhaps Mulekite religion that existed before the people of Zarahemla and the people of Nephi were combined under Mosiah₁.³⁹

39 Others have written concerning the joinder of the Nephite and the Mulekites (e.g., John L. Sorenson, “The Mulekites”, *BYU Studies*, Volume 30:3, Summer 1990, 6, <https://ojs.lib.byu.edu/spc/index.php/BYUStudies/article/viewFile/5873/5523>).

Because this article is focused on the nature and development of the doctrine of resurrection in the Book of Mormon, I will not look further into the nature of Nephite/Mulekite religion before and after Alma₁ established a church among them. For current purposes it suffices to observe that the resurrection doctrine taught by Alma₁ was considered unorthodox by some at Zarahemla. But so was King Benjamin's teaching concerning the coming of a suffering Messiah to be called Jesus Christ. Did King Benjamin also teach his people about the resurrection from the dead so that the Church of God in Zarahemla perfectly combined the almost identical teachings of these two great Book of Mormon prophets, or was Abinadi the sole source of the resurrection doctrine that was later developed by Alma₂ and Samuel the Lamanite?

King Benjamin's Teaching Omits the Doctrine of Resurrection

The only explicit references to the doctrine of resurrection in the Book of Mormon before Abinadi fulfilled his mission are connected with the life and ministry of Nephi₁'s younger brother Jacob. Nephi₁ recorded Lehi's final patriarchal instructions and blessing to Jacob, including:

The teaching that the Messiah would enable the redemption of man by offering himself as a sacrifice for sin for all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit (2 Nephi 2:6, 7).

- The connected good news that the Messiah would take his life again by the power of the Spirit as the firstfruits of the resurrection (2 Nephi 2:8, 9; Jacob 4:11).

And then in his later ministry Jacob expanded what he had learned when he additionally taught that:

- Death and resurrection came as related parts of "the merciful plan of the great Creator" (2 Nephi 9:6).
- The great Creator would make an infinite atonement to enable all flesh to rise from the grave (2 Nephi 9:5, 7–11).

While the Book of Mormon glosses over the political issues that were involved saying little more than that the Nephite leader was appointed King of the combined people because of the literacy of the latter (Omni 1:13–19), there are suggestions that this joinder was not happy after two generations with the Amlicites possibly rejecting the Nephite aristocratic leadership perhaps because they descended from Mulek who had the greatest claim upon the kingship. It has also been observed that the Amalekite religion may have been a carry over from Mulekite times.

- The resurrection enabled the restoration of the captive bodies and captive spirits to one to another respectively from death and hell in an incorruptible form (2 Nephi 9:12, 13).
- This resurrection of individuals would include the restoration of a perfect knowledge of their earthly existence and choices in preparation for the judgment day (2 Nephi 9:13–15, 22; Jacob 6:9, 10).

But after those teachings of Jacob, there is no mention of the doctrine of resurrection taught by Jacob until Abinadi refreshed it. Now partly that may be because there is no record of anything much between Jacob and King Benjamin (perhaps between 550 and 130 BC). But it may be significant that Benjamin did not teach the doctrine of resurrection despite his detailed exposition of the doctrine of atonement in his final address when he proclaimed his son Mosiah₂ as the new king around 124 BC. While it is possible, as the Rabbi Marmorstein and Robert Matthews quoted above suggest, that Benjamin simply took for granted the fact that his people understood that there would be a resurrection of at least the righteous or that their resurrection was implicit, still Benjamin's omission is surprising since his explanation of the atonement was so detailed. Indeed, it seems unlikely that Benjamin would have left the doctrine of resurrection out of his lengthy final address if he knew and understood that doctrine. Thus it is appropriate to detail exactly what King Benjamin did teach about the atonement.

Benjamin told the people that he had served them “walking with a clear conscience before God ... that [he] might be found blameless ... when [he should] stand to be judged of God” (Mosiah 2:27). He used the language of atonement to explain his desire for a clear conscience. He had lived a life of righteousness and had summoned his people to listen to his final conference address “that [their] blood should not come upon [him]” (Mosiah 2:27). He spoke of his desire to “rid [his] garments of [their] blood, at [the] ... time when [he was] about to go down to [his] grave, that [he] might go down in peace, and [his] immortal spirit may join the choirs above in singing the praises of a just God” (Mosiah 2:28).

There was no mention of a hope of a glorious resurrection in an incorruptible body. He only spoke of dying with a clear conscience and a desire that his spirit would join the choirs above. While King Benjamin may have taken the knowledge of the doctrine of resurrection for granted in his people, it is surprising that he did not mention it since the

resurrection doctrine is such a powerful generator of hope and faith in hearers in any age.

It appears that Benjamin was in possession of the Small Plates of Nephi containing Jacob's teachings at the time of this last address since Amaleki infers that he passed them on to Benjamin when he was still king (Omni 1:25). It also seems likely that Benjamin did not retain possession of these sacred things after he passed along the keys of his office to his son Mosiah₂, who was thereafter recognized as a seer in his father's place (Mosiah 8:12–18). A practice of passing on the plates and interpreters seems to have been followed when Alma₂ passed his keys along to his son Helaman₁ (Alma 37:1–12). If Benjamin had received Nephi's Small Plates by the time of his final address and was familiar with their contents, it is surprising that he needed a separate revelation to learn from an angel that the name of the coming Messiah would be Jesus Christ (Mosiah 3:2–8) since that was already recorded in the Small Plates of Nephi. (2 Nephi 10:3).

Nephi and Jacob [and later Abinadi (Mosiah 15:21)] both knew that the Messiah would be called Christ, for Jacob had that name revealed to him in the first century after Lehi arrived in the promised land (2 Nephi 10:3), and he and his immediate successors used that name frequently.⁴⁰ While King Benjamin taught his sons “all the language of his fathers” (Mosiah 1:2) so that they might “know concerning the prophecies . . . spoken by the mouths of their fathers” (Mosiah 1:2) and “concerning the records which were engraven on the plates of brass” (Mosiah 1:3), it does not appear that he taught them the language in which the brass plates were written (Mosiah 1:3, 4). And when he testified of the truthfulness of the “plates of Nephi” (Mosiah 1:6) with an admonition that his sons “search them diligently” (Mosiah 1:7), it is probable that he was referring to the Large Plates of Nephi, which had been kept in the royal line in accordance with Nephi's original direction (1 Nephi 9:4; 2 Nephi 5:31–33), rather than the Small Plates, which had only recently been given to him by Amaleki and which had come down through Nephi's younger brother Jacob who never succeeded to the kingship.⁴¹

40 Note also that Nephi is still the record keeper at this point. See also 2 Nephi 25:19–29; 26:1, 8, 12; 27:11; 30:5, 7; 31:2–21; 32:3, 6, 9; 33:6–7, 9–12; Jacob 1:4, 6–8; 2:19; 4:4–6, 11–12; 6:8–9; 7:2–3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 17, 19; Enos 1:8, 15, 26–27; Omni 1:26 for prophetic reference to Jesus Christ in the record known as the Small Plates of Nephi.

41 2 Nephi 5:18; Jacob 1:10, 11, 14–15. In both of these chapters there is an inference that the priesthood keys and the authority of the king may have been separated when Nephi died since most of 2 Nephi after chapter 5 was recorded

There are various reasons why King Benjamin may not have read the Small Plates of Nephi including: first, that they covered the same period as the Large Plates of Nephi to that time (1 Nephi 6 and 9) and were less detailed (1 Nephi 6 and 9); second, they may have been written in a priestly language that was unfamiliar to those who had not been schooled to understand them⁴² or who did not have access to Urim and Thummim;⁴³ and finally, it is possible that the Small Plates contained sacred priestly knowledge that was purposely withheld from the generality of the people, awaiting revelation by a later foreordained prophet in a day of greater faith.⁴⁴

If King Benjamin only became able and entitled to read and understand the Small Plates when Amaleki handed them to him at the end of his life, it is possible that he had not had time to read them before he gave his sermon. If that is correct, then it is not surprising that he required a separate revelation from an angel to authorize him to reveal the Messiah's mortal name to his people, perhaps so that he would not break a commandment of priestly secrecy that protected the contents of the priestly record given to him by Amaleki.

There are ample templates for this possibility, both in the Book of Mormon record that has come down to us⁴⁵ and elsewhere in scripture

by Jacob as Nephi's priestly successor, and the reference in Jacob 1 immediately follows the explanation that Jacob's role was to minister to the people at the temple and was separate from the office of King or Nephi. If these offices were separated after Nephi's death, perhaps they came together again when Amaleki handed the Small Plates of Nephi to King Benjamin resulting in his delivery of an atonement day sermon at the temple rather than the seedless Amaleki (Omni 1:25) as Jacob's priestly successor. Nephi₁ also alludes to a separation between his spiritual and his temporal role when he refers to the primary spiritual purpose of the Small Plates (1 Nephi 9:2, 3).

42 Above, n 41.

43 Mosiah₁ and Mormon both refer to their written language as having changed with the passage of time (Omni 1:17, 18; Mormon 9:34). Nephi₁ also seems to have appreciated that written language changes with time (1 Nephi 3:19). Zeniff seems to have taken particular pride in the fact that he had been "taught in all the language of the Nephites" (Mosiah 9:1). He may thus have been a member of a priestly class, one of whose reasons for returning to the city of Nephi-Lehi was to reclaim the temple Nephi had built and which the Nephites had abandoned when they followed Mosiah₁ down to the Mulekite land of Zarahemla.

44 Below, n 45 and supporting text.

45 For example, in Alma 12, when Zeezrom showed signs of repentance at Ammonihah and asked Alma₂ whence came this knowledge of the doctrine of resurrection, Alma₂ responded by saying that "it is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless, they are laid under a strict command that they

that the Latter-day Saints hold as canonical.⁴⁶ The suggestion that King Benjamin might not have read the Small Plates of Nephi is difficult for Latter-day Saints to accept since that record was so important to Nephi₁ (1 Nephi 6 and 9) and has become similarly important to us because of the loss of the first 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript. But the possibility that this record was not accessible to the generality of the Nephite people, and that King Benjamin did not know from the scriptures that the Messiah would be named Jesus Christ on earth and may not have known that the Messiah's atonement would bring to pass the resurrection from the dead, suggest the possibility that Benjamin had not read the Small Plates when he gave his sermon at the temple. It also seems likely that Mormon had not read the Small Plates of Nephi before he was well engaged in his grand abridgement of the Large Plates of Nephi for the record that we know as the Book of Mormon (Words of Mormon 1:3–7).

If Benjamin had already read the Small Plates of Nephi and knew the name of Christ, then perhaps what happened the night before he delivered his sermon at the temple is that he was given angelic dispensation to reveal knowledge of the Messiah's personal name to his people at approximately the same time as Abinadi unfolded a knowledge of the suffering Messiah to be named Christ, and the doctrine of the resurrection to King Noah's priests. That timing would seem to accord with the Lord's purposes since the time of Messiah's mortal birth and the resurrection were rapidly approaching.

Using the text of what has been recorded of King Benjamin's sermon at the temple, I now set out the passages that suggest to me that King Benjamin may not have understood the nature and doctrine of the resurrection when he gave his sermon at the temple. Some will ask how he could have believed in the atonement without the resurrection. That should be a relatively simple question for a modern Latter-day Saint to answer since there are many modern Christians who do not believe that Christ has a body even though they believe He was resurrected, and there are many Christians and Jews who do believe in a bodily resurrection

shall not impart, only according to the portion of his words which he doth grant unto the children of men" (Alma 12:8–10). A similar pattern of withholding sacred knowledge can be seen in Alma₂'s instructions to his son Helaman detailing what he could and could not reveal when he made him custodian of the sacred records and passed on to him the office of High Priest over the people of Nephi (Alma 37:11, 13–15, 21–33).

⁴⁶ For example, in Moses 1:42 and in the Savior's use of parables during his earthly ministry (Matthew 13:33–34).

but who do not believe that it is universal. It is also clear from the Book of Mormon text, that there were many Nephites who did not believe that there would be a bodily resurrection or that there should be a Christ, even though they still believed in the law of Moses.⁴⁷

Even when Benjamin taught his people what the angel had taught him about the coming Messiah including the name by which He would be known in the flesh, Benjamin still did not directly teach the resurrection. He taught:

- In a not far distant time, the Lord Omnipotent shall come down from heaven among the children of men and in a tabernacle of clay shall work mighty miracles (Mosiah 3:5).
- He shall be tempted and tried even more than other men such that blood will come from every pore of his body (Mosiah 3:7).
- He shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, and His mother shall be called Mary (Mosiah 3:8).
- He shall be scourged and crucified and rise the third day and thereafter judge the world (Mosiah 3:9, 10).

There is no use of the word *resurrection* in connection with Christ's rising nor suggestion that anyone else would rise or be resurrected either. Everything Benjamin said was focused upon the need for his people to be cleansed by atonement. All their Mosaic ordinances were revealed anew by King Benjamin's instructing angel as a type and prefiguring of Christ who would atone for their sins. There is no use of the word *redeem* or *redemption* in King Benjamin's address. The closest Benjamin came to teaching such a doctrine was his statement that Christ would rise the third day after He was crucified, though such rising does not infer a bodily resurrection.

Part IV — Abinadi and the Doctrine of Resurrection

Where then did Abinadi learn the doctrine of resurrection? Had he read the Small Plates of Nephi that contained Jacob's teaching? Did he perhaps belong to a priestly class that had access to protected sacred

⁴⁷ See for example, Alma₂ and the sons of Mosiah₂ in Mosiah 26:1–2 and Sherem in Jacob 7. Zeezrom may have also believed in the law of Moses though not in the coming of Christ and the resurrection from the grave, before his conversion (Alma 12:8).

knowledge, or had he received a separate revelation, like King Benjamin, in preparation for the Savior's approaching birth in the flesh?

At the time Abinadi declared repentance among the people of King Noah, the Small Plates of Nephi were still in the custody of either Amaleki or his father Abinadom. But it is possible that Abinadi was a member of Zeniff's party that went up to reclaim their land of inheritance (Omni 1:27–30; Mosiah 7, 9–10) — indeed, Amaleki says that he had a brother who went with that group and who had not returned, perhaps implying that he expected that missing brother to have returned and become custodian of the records (Omni 1:30).⁴⁸ If Abinadi was not familiar with the contents of the Small Plates of Nephi before Zeniff's party departed for the land of Lehi-Nephi, his knowledge of the doctrine contained in the Small Plates might also be explained by some low-level perhaps priestly interaction between the people of King Noah in the land of Nephi and the people of King Mosiah₁ and King Benjamin in the land of Zarahemla. However, such contact seems unlikely since there is no reference to such interaction in the records kept by Zeniff's colony and none of the various Nephite groups in the land of Lehi-Nephi seem to have been able to find their way back to the land of Zarahemla without help.⁴⁹ What seems more likely is that Abinadi belonged to a family who

48 Note that it is unlikely that Abinadom is the same person as Abinadi since his small contribution to the book of Omni speaks only of his personal involvement in war with the curious addition that “the record of this people is had by the kings, according to the generations; and I know of no revelation save that which has been written, neither prophecy” (Omni 1:10, 11). The curiosity is that he discounts these plates compared with those kept by the kings. Perhaps there were additional wise purposes why these plates became separate from those kept by the kings — including that they became an additional and separate witness of the name of Christ and of the doctrine of resurrection. See also Roger Terry's suggestion that Abinadi was Amaleki's missing brother (Roger Terry, “Scripture Notes: Unearthing Abinadi's Genealogy,” *Sunstone Magazine*, 11 June 2013, <https://www.sunstonemagazine.com/scripture-notes-unearthing-abinadis-genealogy/>).

49 Mosiah 8 (verse 7 in particular) documents King Limhi's unsuccessful efforts to find the way back to the land of Zarahemla, finding instead the records of the extinct Jaredite civilization (see also Mosiah 21:25, 26, 36). Initially, the Amulonites had no interest in finding either the land of Lehi-Nephi or the land of Zarahemla, but sought a passage back to the land of Lehi-Nephi when that knowledge enabled them to make peace with the armies of the Lamanites who found them when unsuccessfully following the people of King Limhi who had escaped to Zarahemla through Ammon's guidance (Mosiah 23:30–37). The people

had preserved the knowledge of Jacob's teaching in some way⁵⁰ — or that he had received a separate and more detailed revelation of the doctrine of atonement, redemption, and resurrection than had been provided even to King Benjamin by the angel that appeared to him on the eve of his sermon at the temple.⁵¹

However Abinadi knew the doctrine, it was controversial, compelling, and converting in at least one case when he taught it. No sooner had Alma₁ escaped from King Noah than he began teaching the words of Abinadi (Mosiah 18:1). What Alma₁ taught from Abinadi was

That which was to come, and also concerning the resurrection of the dead, and the redemption of the people, which was to be brought to pass through the power, and sufferings, and death of Christ, and his resurrection and ascension into heaven. (Mosiah 18:2)

It appears from this summary of Alma₁'s teaching that the part of Abinadi's teaching that most caught Alma₁'s attention was his teaching about redemption and resurrection. If King Benjamin's people did not know any more than to keep the law of Moses for the sake of keeping their consciences clear, then that was likely the extent of the most detailed doctrinal teaching that King Noah's priests could provide as well. Small wonder that any people with less than half a knowledge of the plan of salvation should have need of a prophet to call them to repentance. The hope of a resurrection is the best and most inspiring part of the plan.

What additional insights did Abinadi provide into the doctrine of resurrection that do not exist in Jacob's more general teaching, and how was the doctrine of resurrection taught among the Nephites and Lamanites once Abinadi had refreshed it? The doctrine of resurrection flows after Abinadi from Alma₁ to Alma₂ to Helaman₁ and Corianton,

of Alma₁ were also eventually able to escape their Amulonite/Lamanite bondage to the land of Zarahemla but required divine guidance to do so (Mosiah 24:16–25).

50 If Abinadi was Amaleki's lost brother and another son of Abinadom who had become hereditary custodians of Nephi₁'s sacred record of priestly ministry among the people, then Abinadi was likely himself a priest and may have been one of the priests of Zeniff who was displaced when King Noah succeeded him. If so, he may have been familiar with Alma₁ or even related to him making it more understandable why King Mosiah₂ should have passed the records over to Alma₁ when he divided church and state and allowed Alma₁ to establish a church among the people of Zarahemla.

51 Alma₂ taught that many who qualified themselves by worthiness and careful study, received revelations that the Lord kept from the generality of the people (Alma 12:9–11; 13:8–20; 37:43–46; 40:3, 15, 20–21).

through Helaman₂, his son Nephi₂ to Samuel the Lamanite, and then to Nephi₃ in time for the very first resurrection.

Abinadi Provides More Detail About the Doctrine of Resurrection Than Jacob

Abinadi provided five insights into the doctrine of resurrection that were not previously recorded in the writings of Nephi₁ and Jacob that have come down to us in the Book of Mormon:

1. The concept of a first resurrection.
2. The idea that the righteous will be resurrected before the wicked.
3. The idea that the righteous till the time of Christ will be resurrected almost simultaneously with him.
4. The idea that those who died in ignorance of the gospel will have part in the first resurrection.
5. The idea that little children will be automatically resurrected.

When President Joseph F. Smith received his revelation of the redemption of the dead, it came as a response to his questions about the meaning of passages discussing the spirit world in the New Testament (D&C 138:1–10). For example, he wondered how Christ could have taught all the disembodied spirits in paradise in the three days while he was there, which was his understanding from what Peter had taught in his first epistle (D&C 138:28). In the revelation that President Smith received, he learned that Christ's three-day ministry among the disembodied spirits was spent instructing prophet leaders there how that work was to be done now that the gates of the prison house had been opened (D&C 138:29–36).

When Abinadi taught the doctrine of resurrection, his focus was upon its genesis for there had not yet been any resurrection. In essence what he taught the people was if you want to be resurrected first with Christ, then you need to be counted among the righteous for the wicked will not have that opportunity. And then he listed those who counted as the righteous:

- The prophets (Mosiah 15:22).
- All those who believed on their words, or all those who kept the commandments (Mosiah 15:22).
- Little children (Mosiah 15:25).

But Abinadi generalized and that generality led to questions in Alma₂, and questions from holy men with inquiring minds lead to new and additional revelations (Alma 5:46–48; 40:3). What questions arise from Abinadi’s teaching about those who would have part in the first resurrection?

Abinadi’s use of the word *or*, between those who believed the prophets and those who kept the commandments in his list of those who would have part in the first resurrection, raises a question. It suggests that while he knew there would be a resurrection of people who died in ignorance, he was not sure how they qualified for resurrection if they did not know the gospel so as to live it. Surely participation in the first resurrection was not the simple product of ignorance of the gospel and principles of righteousness. If the generally wicked and rebellious were excluded from resurrection at the time of Christ, then surely those who were ignorant and wicked would not be resurrected.

This is the very same question that occurred to Joseph Smith and which was answered in the revelation now recorded as D&C 137. But questions about the resurrection of little children also arise from Abinadi’s summary. Clearly innocent children qualify for eternal life and will be resurrected among the righteous, but when? Abinadi seems to use the phrases *first resurrection* and *eternal life* interchangeably, but he retreats from using both expressions together in connection with little children. We can now surmise that is because little children may have to wait to be resurrected until their righteous parents can raise them as they have been promised by Joseph Smith among others.⁵²

Most interesting in Abinadi’s teaching and certainly most interesting to Alma₂ was the question of timing that comes from Abinadi’s idea of a first resurrection. In the latter-days, our patriarchs bless us all, if righteous, that we will have part in the first resurrection. In our context, the first resurrection means the resurrection of the just that happens before any unjust persons are resurrected. But for Abinadi, the focus was upon the resurrection that happened at the same time that Christ was resurrected. He wanted his listeners to want to be part of that resurrection and so he told them how to qualify. But his generality left unanswered questions when Alma₂ pondered his father’s record of Abinadi’s words.

⁵² Joseph F. Smith, “Status of Children in the Resurrection,” *Improvement Era*, May 1918, 571.

Part V — The Doctrine of Resurrection in the Book of Mormon After Abinadi – Alma₂

We learn of Alma₂'s further questions about the resurrection in his record of his disciplinary discussion with his son Corianton following the latter's moral transgression during missionary service (Alma 39–42). Corianton had sought to justify his transgression to his father by expressing doubts about what he was teaching concerning the resurrection.⁵³ These same questions had occurred to his father who had previously made them the subject of diligent inquiry (Alma 5:46–48; 40:3). Alma₂'s further insights into the doctrine of resurrection are listed below:

- No one is resurrected until after the coming of Christ (Alma 40:2).
- There is a specific time appointed when every person will be resurrected, but only God knows that time (Alma 40:4, 9).
- There will likely be multiple times of resurrection since there will be righteous people who live and die after Christ dies and is resurrected (Alma 40:5, 8).
- Alma₂ believed that the righteous till Christ would be resurrected with him (Alma 40:20).⁵⁴

Alma₂ also discussed with Corianton what was meant by the phrase *first resurrection*, which raised some of the ambiguities I have mentioned above.⁵⁵ Alma₂ conceded a third possible meaning for the phrase *first*

53 There is an irony here that was surely not lost of Alma₂ since he would have remembered his own disbelief in the doctrine of resurrection had been part of his own justification for sin before his conversion (Mosiah 26:1–4).

54 Note that Samuel the Lamanite evidently received more revelation in answer to this question since he prophesied that “many graves shall be opened, and shall yield up many of their dead; and many saints shall appear unto many” (Helaman 14:25) as a sign of Christ's death. Though our record of Samuel's words does not speak of this as resurrection, Christ seems to have so characterized it among the Nephites (3 Nephi 23:9–13), which is a little odd since one would not have expected them to rise until Christ had first been resurrected, which was after the three days of tumult had subsided.

55 Note also that the resurrection of Christ and those resurrected with him is one way to understand the phrase “first resurrection.” The other common meaning is to distinguish the resurrection of the just from the unjust, the former being the first.

resurrection — namely the restoration of the disembodied souls of the righteous to a state of happiness between death and the resurrection (Alma 40:15). And while Alma₂ could understand why some of his contemporaries might have thought that was what the phrase meant, he said that what Abinadi intended by the phrase was “the reuniting of the soul with the body, of those from the days of Adam down to the resurrection of Christ” (Alma 40:18), which is not the normal use of the phrase among Latter-day Saints.

Alma₂ had also taught others the doctrine of the resurrection before his discussion with Corianton. He saw and used it as a powerful missionary tool that would encourage all his hearers to repentance. That he had taught it to Amulek, his missionary companion before their preaching at the city of Ammonihah, is evident in Amulek’s detailed exposition of the doctrine in response to Zeezrom’s efforts to cross him in his words:

And he shall come into the world to redeem his people; and he shall take upon himself the transgressions of those who believe on his name; and these are they that have eternal life, and salvation cometh to none else. Therefore the wicked remain as though there had been no redemption made, except it be the loosing of the bands of death; for behold, the day cometh that all shall rise from the dead and stand before God, and be judged according to their works. Now, there is a death which is called a temporal death; and the death of Christ shall loose the bands of this temporal death, that all shall be raised from this temporal death. The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame, even as we now are at this time; and we shall be brought to stand before God, knowing even as we know now, and have a bright recollection of all our guilt. Now, this restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous; and even there shall not so much as a hair of their heads be lost; but every thing shall be restored to its perfect frame, as it is now, or in the body, and shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil. Now, behold, I have spoken unto you concerning the death of the mortal body, and also concerning

the resurrection of the mortal body. I say unto you that this mortal body is raised to an immortal body, that is from death, even from the first death unto life, that they can die no more; their spirits uniting with their bodies, never to be divided; thus the whole becoming spiritual and immortal, that they can no more see corruption. (Alma 11:40–45)

This is the clearest explanation of the physical nature of the resurrection that exists in scripture. It goes into detail well beyond that provided by Abinadi and suggests that either Alma₂ or Amulek or both of them, had been given more detailed answers to questions that occurred to them as they prepared for their missionary work among the Ammonihahites.

Samuel the Lamanite

The next person to have received revelation in connection with the doctrine of the resurrection was Samuel the Lamanite. While Alma₂ had certainly anticipated the doctrine Samuel taught when he opined to his son Corianton that the souls and bodies of the righteous would be reunited at the time of Christ's resurrection (Alma 40:20), Samuel spoke with the authority of one ordained to impart a specific message. Detailing to the wicked Nephites no more than 6 years before Christ's birth, the signs that would attest his birth and those that would attest his death, he included among the latter the statement that "many graves shall be opened, and shall yield up many of their dead; and many saints shall appear unto many" (Helaman 14:25).

This passage is a little awkward since it seems to suggest that the graves were opened and the resurrected dead appeared before the end of the three days darkness, which would have been before Christ was resurrected.⁵⁶ But the passage is most significant because mention of its fulfillment had been omitted from the canonized version of the Nephite scriptures of which Nephi₃ was custodian at the time Christ came and ministered personally among the Nephites. It is the more memorable for two reasons. Firstly, that Christ directed that it be included in the scriptural record of which Nephi₃ was custodian (3 Nephi 23:9–13) to ensure that there was a record kept of the fulfillment of this prophecy.⁵⁷

56 It seems more likely that the dead were seen after the darkness lifted else how could they have been seen?

57 Apparently Christ was disappointed that this fulfillment of prophecy had not been recorded in the year that elapsed between the signs of His death and His

And second, because our translation of that account still does not include the correction — so that we only know about it because Nephi₃ faithfully recorded all he was allowed to record of the Savior’s personal ministry, even when his record revealed his faults.⁵⁸

References to Resurrection After Samuel

The remaining references to the doctrine of resurrection in the Book of Mormon do not add to our understanding. For while Christ expounded all things from the beginning including the resurrection in 3 Nephi 26, Mormon has only given us an abridged account⁵⁹ which restates that

all people ... shall stand before God, to be judged of their works ... [if] they be good, to the resurrection of everlasting life; and if they be evil to the resurrection of damnation ... according to the mercy, and the justice, and the holiness which is in Christ, who was before the world began. (3 Nephi 26:4–5)

Mormon knew more than he wrote since he had the unabridged account of Christ’s ministry and teaching before him, but he was instructed to add no more (3 Nephi 26: 8–11), though he did reference the doctrine in passing in one of his pastoral letters to his son Moroni (Moroni 7:41). Moroni also added a little when he referred to the universal resurrection being hailed by a trump (Mormon 9:13; D&C 88:94–102), and his expectation of being “brought forth triumphant through the air” (Moroni 10:34).

Internal Consistency of the Book of Mormon

There are a number of matters that arise from this discussion that tend to prove the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. They include that:

personal appearance among the Nephites (3 Nephi 8:2; 10:18).

58 The correction of records made by inscription on metal plates is difficult if not impossible. When that difficulty is recognized, it seems that Nephi₃’s simple addition that this had been omitted satisfies the witness purpose required by Christ when He ministered among the Nephites. That is, it was not possible for Nephi to go back and add a few extra lines at the relevant place in the chronological record upon the large plates of Nephi later abridged by Mormon.

59 This by instruction from Christ (3 Nephi 26:11). He recorded the “lesser part of the things which he taught among the people ... first, to try their faith, and if it shall so be that they shall believe these things then shall the greater things be made manifest unto them” (3 Nephi 26:8, 9).

- The doctrine develops consistently.
- If Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery had perceived that King Benjamin did not teach the doctrine of resurrection after Lehi and Jacob had already done so, they would likely have tried to correct King Benjamin's sermon or would have tried to explain the omission.
- Alma₁ was impressed by Abinadi's teaching of the doctrine of resurrection. He would not have been so impressed if he had known Jacob's teaching on the same subject.
- The doctrine impressed Alma₂ in exactly the places where Abinadi had added to Jacob's teaching.
- It is hard to imagine Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery coming up with such a subtle doctrinal sub-plot if the Book of Mormon was their fictional creation.

Conclusion

The development of the doctrine of resurrection in the Book of Mormon is a story of great subtlety. Though it seemed well established and elementary in Jacob's teaching during the first century after the Lehi colony arrived in the promised land, it was heretical and perhaps even seditious when Abinadi restored it in his teaching in the land of Lehi-Nephi and particularly in the court of King Noah and his priests. But it was also inspirational and motivational. It was part of the reason why Alma₁ left King Noah's court and established the first Church of Christ among the Nephites. From Abinadi's ministry onwards, this doctrine coupled with the doctrine of the suffering servant Messiah formed the core of orthodox Nephite teaching. A desire to learn more about the doctrine of resurrection led Alma₂ to detailed reflection and the further revelation that followed, enabled him to establish the Church in Zarahemla and the surrounding lands. It provided the people of the church, which he and his father established, a stronger reason to live righteous lives. Alma₂ also used the doctrine of resurrection to strengthen his teaching of the need for repentance to his wayward son Corianton.

While it appears that the Nephites knew less about the doctrine of resurrection than the Latter-day Saints even after the revelations received by Abinadi, Alma₂, and Samuel the Lamanite, those inspired leaders used their new doctrinal insights to motivate those whom they led to better lives of righteousness. The gap between what the Nephites knew

about resurrection and what the Latter-day Saints now know suggests that we live below our privileges. These differences in understanding also attest the authenticity of the Book of Mormon translational process. For if Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were not themselves learning these doctrines as they proceeded, it would have been very hard for them to avoid correcting the gaps in understanding that appear in the story, particularly in King Benjamin's atonement day sermon.

These insights into doctrinal development within the Book of Mormon, also suggest that this book has barely begun to do its work in convincing Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ.

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